

CHAPTER 7

You Say *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*? Japanese Critical Perceptions of the Idea of Europe: A Preliminary Reflection for the Regeneration of Universal Humanism

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1 Preliminary Observations

1.1 *From Conceptual Impasse to Mutual Dialogue*

If the reader is interested in the ideas of Europe that Asians have concocted, I would strongly recommend reading their travel writings. I am not making this proposal out of nationalistic patriotism. And yet the lack of bilateral balance in the flow of information should be mentioned: European literature is fully accessible in Japanese translation but not vice versa.

It should not be forgotten that many Europeans have left writings on the Rest of the world. These European observations have served as the basis for descriptions in fields ranging from the natural sciences to humanities (like *Der Kosmos* by Alexander von Humboldt). In the case of Japan, we can easily establish a list from Saint Francis Xavier (1506–1552), or Luís Fróis (1532–1597), Engerbert Kempfer, Franz von Siebold, B.H. Chamberlain, and Lafcadio Hearn up to Roland Barthes and Maurice Pinguet (Saeki and Haga 1987). Natural history, as well as geography and ethnography, have since developed into modern academic disciplines, and Western methodology is predominant today, especially in social sciences. Area studies and cultural anthropology are no exception. Most cultural theories are European or Western products and it is rare that the non-European reflections on Europe have been seriously taken into account (Le Pichon and Eco 2011).

This lack of reciprocity has been questioned. Naoki Sakai has vehemently criticized the basic distinction between Western *humanitas* and non-Western *anthropos*: *humanitas*, originating from Europe, has subordinated the Rest of the world as *anthropos*. Non-Europeans (from Asia, Africa, and South America) serve as the suppliers of primary data for the benefit of Western theories, which claim the status of *humanitas*. The West (*humaine*) consumes the raw (i.e., *sauvage*) materials supplied by the Rest (Sakai 2001). In the post-colonial

context, this dichotomy has not been overcome; on the contrary, the hegemony of European scientific methodology has been reinforced by the Westernized immigrant intellectuals. These *aussereuropäische* émigré academics, coming from the Rest of the world, now represent (by way of their intoxication to) Western scholarship, occupying core or marginal positions in many European and American universities.

1.2 *Crisis of the European Model*

The European style educational system has almost completely seized the entire surface of the human habitable zone on the earth, suffocating so-called non-European traditional cultures (in the name of ‘human rights’, preventing child abuse, etc.). In parallel, cultural anthropology has lost its conventional ‘fields’ of research in the last 40 years. English or American language(s) have triumphed as the only ‘officially recognized working’ language(s) (of hegemonic importance), especially in natural sciences: other European languages (including French or German) have lost their ‘civil rights’, while other ‘minor’ non-European languages are literally on the edge of extinction (made to survive perhaps only by the discipline of area studies, in the category of *anthropos*).

To what extent is Europe responsible for this English-American linguistic imperialism? I ask this question because some scholars, like Geoffrey Barraclough, strongly oppose the idea of including Britain and the US among the European cultural legacy (Barraclough 1963; Barraclough and Kimura 1977). Let us also add, however, that the current linguistic neo-colonialism by English-American languages is doomed to decline sooner or later: before the mid-21st century the Spanish speaking population of the United States will outnumber English speakers; and statistically speaking, at least in non-academic fields, Chinese and Spanish enjoy a much greater numbers of users than the official language of the former British Empire.

1.3 *Toward a Methodological ‘Clash of Projections’*

Yet the geographical ‘territorial issue’ of linguistic occupation is not my main concern here. Let me mention Sir George Sansom to explain my intention. This British scholar and diplomat is known for having written one of the best accounts of Japanese cultural history for European readers (Sansom 1931). The merit of his writing consists of its treating Japan not as an isolated case in a far off place, but as an important organic part of the entirety of World History. His comparative approach not only allowed him to make Japan accessible to a Western (or at least English and French) readership, but it also enabled Japanese readers to better understand the particular qualities of British (in particular) and European culture and society (in general). Characteristics

of each culture cannot be revealed without mutual elucidation between the observer and the observed. And yet European culture tended to believe in the universal validity of its own criteria when judging other cultures in reference to European standards considered superior, absolutely rational and ultimately relevant.

The reverse tendency of ego-centrism among the Non-Western Rest was no less harmful. In Japanese studies, the controversy around Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and The Sword* is a typical case (Benedict 1946). Based upon interview records of Japanese prisoners of war during the Second World War, the author, an American cultural anthropologist, proposed the idea of Japan as 'the culture of shame', as opposed to the 'culture of sin' (in the model of Judeo-Christian value judgment). This classical book became a famous / infamous bestseller in post-war Japan: Many Japanese nationalists took 'shame culture' as a proof of Japan's moral inferiority. They felt hurt by the American author (and ashamed). They saw her book as asserting the existence of an ethical problem in Japanese culture and of a deficiency rooted in the country's shame culture. This (tautological) reaction is itself a sort of *amour propre blessé*, or a wounded self-respect.

Yet, it is well known that Clifford Geertz, in his *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (1988) reversed this negative perception of the 'shame culture' (Geertz 1988). At the outset, he writes, the Japanese 'shame culture' looked strange and unfamiliar to him, but the reading of Ruth Benedict's entire book finally convinces him of the relevance of the moral judgment based on the feeling of 'shame'. Whereas, upon finishing the book, he could no longer feel at ease with the Judeo-Christian moral code; he had already lost his naive conviction in the guilt and punish model; his spontaneous reliance on the European and Western 'guilty consciousness' as a self-evident and universal moral code had been collapsed.

Similar reciprocal 'deforming' mirror effects of finding an incommensurable chirality (to use an optical metaphor) in encounters with other cultures are not rare. Eminent Europeans have often experienced this uneasy sense of identity crisis in their encounters with Japanese culture. João Rodrigues (1558/60?–1633/4), a Portuguese missionary to Japan, is one of the first cases (Inaga 2008). He tried to understand Japanese language grammar according to the Latin template of declension. But in doing so he found it simply impossible; the Japanese language cannot be reduced to the 'Catholic' i.e. universal code of Latin. This brought him to discover new grammatical categories such as the particle. Two and a half centuries later, Percival Lowell, the famous American astrophysicist and diplomat found a 'reversed world of humpty-dumpty' when he disembarked at Yokohama Bay at the end of the

19th Century. Such experiences have been so frequently repeated by each generation of Euro-American travellers that Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his final book, *L'Autre face de la lune* (2011) composed a succinct genealogy of the Western idea of Japan (Lévi-Strauss 2001). He characterized it as the 'opposite-reversed land' of Europe. Yet I wonder if his vision was not a typical European projection? Lévi-Strauss's theory of complementarity between the West and the East may well be subscribed to the general strategy of *apprivoiser l'Autre* or taming the Other by boxing it into one's own categories. In so doing, the clash of mutual projections is 'adequately' neutralized and domesticated for 'appropriate' arrangement (Inaga 2013).

With this preliminary observation in mind, let me now examine some of the 'ideas of Europe' left by Japanese intellectuals in their encounters with it. Nevertheless, let me declare in advance, to avoid useless misunderstanding, that privileging Japan as an exception is not my intention. I would not want to repeat what has often happened in the case of infamous *Nihonjin-ron*, or discourses on Japanese-ness.¹ I also have to confess the limitation of my own approach: even by limiting myself to Japan, developing a full anthology of Japanese travel writings in Europe would be out of the question (Ōkubo 2008). The following are just three typical but extremely personal case studies ranging through three generations, so as to examine Japanese reactions to three fundamental ideas of Europe that were elaborated in the French Revolution, namely *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité*.

2 Three Cases in Question

2.1 First Case Study: Mori Ōgai and Questioning the Idea of Fraternité

Let us begin with the third idea: *fraternité*. Mori (Rintarō) Ōgai (1862–1922) was one of the first Japanese medical students to stay in Europe. He was sent to Prussia by the Japanese Army in 1884 at the age of 23 and stayed there until 1888. *Mori Ōgai Gedenkstätte* is located in the city of Berlin. He is now remembered as a prolific writer and translator of many European works of literature into Japanese via German original or translations (Goethe, Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Ibsen, H.C. Andersen, Schnitzler, Zola, Maupassant, D'Annunzio, Hofmannsthal, Dostoevsky, and Gorki, to mention just a few). And yet he finished his official career at the top rank of medical doctor and inspector general in the Japanese Army. During his mission in Prussia as a military attaché, the

¹ See the exceptionally original article on *Nihonjin-ron* in Wikipedia ('Nihonjinron', n.d.).

young Ōgai took part in a conference of the International Red Cross held in Karlsruhe in September 1887.²

On the fourth day of the conference, one issue came up in discussion, namely: if a war were to break out outside of Europe, should each branch of the European Red Cross be mobilized for assistance? The question was raised from the Dutch delegation. The supposed 'war', it was assumed, could not be other than a clash between European colonial military powers entering into combat with one another, inevitably involving colonized local rebels. At this occasion, the young Japanese officer got permission to speak and gave his opinion as follows. Firstly, as the issue was concerned only with the European branches, Japan had to step back from the decision-making and abstain from voting. This is of course common sense reasoning in itself, and does not constitute any protest. And yet it also implicitly pointed out the inadequacy of Europeans' grasp of the subject, for they unthinkingly overlooked the presence of non-European membership and representatives. Japan's abstention amounts to an indirect objection to the violation made against the spirit of Red Cross. Mori's voice made it clear to the European members that the issue constituted an imminent threat to the principle of fraternity among the Red Cross constituents. The supposed idea or ideal of 'equality' among members was called into question.

Secondly, Mori also made Japan's position clear: it was not Mori's or Japan's intention to propose a modification of the relevant clause, but in principle the issue should have been presented as follows. If a war were to break out in one continent, the Red Cross branches in other continents would be mobilized to offer assistance. Having said this, Mori added: Japan takes it for granted that the Japanese Red Cross would act to provide necessary assistance if a war were to break out on a continent other than Asia, including, obviously Europe. The minutes of the meeting, kept in French, show that at this statement by Mori, a 'bravo' rose up from the audience (Kobori 2013, 158). In the following session, Mori also made it clear by presenting as proof a printed booklet that the Japanese Army had already distributed to its members with the Japanese translation of the Geneva Convention of 1864 (dealing with the treatment of the prisoners) even though other European nations who had signed it earlier had not yet distributed the document to their militaries. Mori somewhat proudly noted in his diary that the Russian representative, 'Usfaitcheff' (*sic*) gently touched Mori's shoulder and expressed his 'happy amazement'. From then on the European delegates' attitude toward Japan improved remarkably (Kobori 2013, 157–8).

² For biographical details, see Kobori 2013. The anecdote that follows here is on pp. 157–158

Obviously the young Mori, only 26 years old, must have made his statement out of racial and ethnical indignation, feeling implicit discrimination against his nation. The unconscious European ego-centrism was revealed by this young participant from Asia. His rational statement, despite its barely concealed resentment, gained general approval, for it was stated in full respect of the moral spirit which the International Red Cross had been supposed to incarnate: the universal fraternity or brother-sisterhood. Mori's statement, made as a modest contribution by a non-European member, was to be put into practice by the Japanese army as its basic moral spirit during the First World War. The Japanese Red Cross – and especially its mobilized nurses with self-sacrificial devotion – was highly appreciated as having played an exemplary role in the assistance of wounded soldiers. By this time Mori had become one of the most important individuals in the whole military medical rescue operation. It is also well known that the Japanese military discipline in the occupation of the capital Yanjing in China during the so-called 'Boxer Rebellion' (1899–1901) was highly praised. Furthermore, during WWI, the treatment of the German prisoners sent from Qingdao to Japan was exceptionally well regarded by the foreign press.

Naturally the question comes to mind: why was it not so in the Second World War? Why was the Geneva Convention systematically neglected during battles in China and the Pacific Ocean, 20 years after Mori's retirement and death? When and why did the Japanese Army go wrong? One may be horrified by the fact that the atrocities committed by the Japanese Army in China as well as in the Pacific during WW2 can be located in the mechanical extension of the principle that Mori clearly stated at the Karlsruhe International Red Cross Conference: that Japan is entitled to manage according to its own will any war so long as it occurs in Asia. This historical irony also reveals another hidden egocentricity inherent in the benevolent action of the Red Cross movement.

2.2 *Second Case Study: Takeyama Michio, and Questioning the Idea of Égalité*

Europe claims and promotes the idea of equality; and yet the case of Mori's intervention exposed its limit as well as the logical incoherence in its practical application. In fact, many non-European elites and intellectuals could not help feeling that the principle of equality is applied only to European and Europeanized citizens, but not to the 'coloured people'. The case of Takeyama Michio (1903–1984) epitomizes this pattern – yet in an unexpected way and with a self-conscious insight.

One of Takeyama's great-uncles was an eminent early figure in the field of German literature in Japan, though his glory was eclipsed by the return of Mori

Ōgai to Japan. Takeyama himself was also an exceptionally talented intellectual from the privileged elite. He was appointed associate professor at Tokyo High School immediately after his graduation from the Tokyo Imperial University in 1926. The following year he embarked for Europe and stayed there until 1930. During his time in Europe, he travelled to Spain. It was only after Japan's defeat in World War II that he published an essay on his Spanish experience.³

The essay begins with a rather shocking statement: 'What surprised me in Europe is the fact that counterfeit money was in every country'. Takeyama and his cousin were easy victims. If they were not so frequently duped in Germany and France, they noticed that in Spain they were ideal targets. In the countryside they were about to buy a mantilla, but when his cousin put 5 huge silver five-peseta coins on the table, something unexpected happened. The shopkeeper (a lady of a certain age; her gender cannot be overlooked in this cultural and historical context) gazed at the coins, and then all of a sudden screamed. People around them got angry and furiously accused the Japanese tourists of treachery. About twenty coins of the five-peseta they had received previously in exchange turned out to be fake money. The two Japanese gentlemen cleverly learned a lesson from this 'surprisingly' unpleasant incident, and took caution not to receive any more fake coins. Still, how to get rid of the doomed fake 20-odd coins before leaving Spain remained their obsessive concern.

Several times they tried to 'cheat' the Spanish merchants or tried to pay with the dubious coins for the entrance of a bullfight; of course every attempt stupidly and miserably failed; the local people were shrewder than the naïve tourists. They once lost their reservation at a hotel as the room had been changed without their being notified. Despite the cancellation, a hotel boy chased after them to ask for a tip. They handed him the ill-fated coins. The next day the boy waited for the two Japanese at the entrance of a new hotel. Obviously, his aim was to ask to change the counterfeit to the genuine currency.

It so happened that it was not until they took the international train for France that they could pay farewell to the wicked coins. The chance for liquidation finally came when they were to pay their bill in the dining car. The payment was to be made by dropping the coins in a silver bowl that the chief server carried by hand. The bowl was already full of silver coins glittering in a gorgeous fashion. The Japanese took mischievous courage in pouring the dubious coins into this bowl. The chief server, while gazing at the coins with the effigy of the Crown Prince, did not say anything. He might have noticed the nature of the wicked coins by their clinking sound. Maybe the dignity of his

3 For Takeyama's biography, Hirakawa 2013. The anecdote that follows here is in Takeyama 2017, 15–34.

profession prevented him from complaining to his foreign customers despite his concealed scepticism. In any case, now that the coins were deposited in the bowl, no one could discern who contributed the genuine coins and who mixed in the illegal coins.

Takeyama's cousin said, 'Et voilà,' and the chief servant graciously saluted the guests and left them to move on to his subsequent duty. The two Japanese men, upon returning to their third class compartment, could not help exclaiming 'bravo!' with delight at their success. But at second thought, Takeyama murmured that they had committed the crime of taking lunch without payment. To this his cousin furiously reacted by saying, quite theoretically: 'We have just returned the counterfeit coins to the Spanish National Railway. This means that we have had the Spanish government compensate. It is simply logical and absolutely normal that the government pay back the damage their people caused to foreigners'. Yet, they could not entirely forget the bad aftertaste of a guilty consciousness their 'success' had left behind. And so they concluded their ill-natured adventure with the following sore remark: 'Fake or forgery should be accomplished with an utmost dignity and noblesse'.

Generally speaking, at border crossings, tourists have to declare taxable assets. They might end up paying the tax with counterfeit money like that foisted on Takeyama. Whether beneficial or harmful, forgery constantly changes its physiognomy. And nobody can be a better eyewitness of this unexpected metamorphosis than the foreign tourist from far away. The reality of frequent treachery and prestidigitation are shamelessly pressed upon foreigners, for they are the best targets and the easiest victims to be cheated. From this experience it seems that our Japanese professor learned how to pay cultural tax at the inter-cultural border crossing. The idea of equality, proclaimed as a European ethical code, reveals itself as unfortunately deceptive, when it is confronted with the economic reality such as the circulation of the counterfeit money. It is from beneath the counterfeit currency that the truth manifests itself.

Money transactions reveal the hidden side of so-called hard currency. The counterfeit coins flooding the black market epitomize the behaviour of the soft currency that surreptitiously sustains the market economy as a whole. A similar counterfeit transaction can easily happen so long as border control is practised amidst unequal power relations. In other words, authority is inevitably destined to create counterfeiters and outlaws, simply because they are indispensable so as to maintain the established social order.

Let us remember that Takeyama remained one of the rare breed of 'conservative' intellectuals; throughout the Cold War he was a staunch anti-communist, basing this opposition to totalitarian hegemony on the same logic

as his rejection of Nazism during the period when Japan concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact with the Third Reich of Nazi Germany in 1936 against the Soviet Union. Takeyama had the insight to perceive what kind of ‘fakes’ had been concealed underneath the specious regimes of National Socialism and Stalinism.

Let me also recall one more fact. The film *The Harp of Burma*, directed by Ichikawa Kon, received the San Giorgio Prize at the Venice Film Festival in September 1956, a few years after Japan’s independence was restored following the 1945 defeat. Michio Takeyama was the author of the novel on which the movie was based. It tells the story of a Japanese ex-soldier musician who remains in Burma after Japan’s defeat; he becomes monk so as to console the souls of the unknown dead whose bodies have been left and scattered in the battlefields. Takeyama, who had lost many of his students mobilized in the war, borrowed a *Märchen* narrative while intending to show through fiction that there had been the possibility of reconciliation between the British and Japanese armies to put the war to an end.

The novel had been published in 1948 despite the strict censorship under the US military occupation on matters related to war. While the Japanese staff members of the American GHQ classified Takeyama’s printed proof as inadequate, the American CIE officers removed the prohibition and allowed the publication. Was it a simple coincidence that Takeyama published his Spanish essay shortly after this incident? Was there not a hidden connivance between the two? Censorship is a form of gate-keeping at a checkpoint. There, egalitarian principles can be easily curtailed. But curiously enough, just as the counterfeit money was miraculously rehabilitated at Takeyama’s border crossing, his own fiction narrative of the war was also saved from self-imposed Japanese censorship. In both cases, thanks to the implicated gatekeepers, the precarious nature of the egalitarian principle was shown while revealing inherent and concealed social crisis. The truth reveals itself through the compensation of the fake manipulation under the threatening risk to equality.

2.3 *Third Case Study: Kudō Tetsumi and the Idea of Liberté*

During the Cold War period, when Takeyama was regarded by the left wing as an opinion leader among conservative liberals, the idea of liberty was highly respected in the Western bloc. 1961 and 1962 saw the coup d’état in Korea, the Cuba Missile Crisis and the independence of Algeria in 1962. In 1963, South Vietnam also experienced a coup d’état, a prelude to the Vietnam War. The Mediterranean Sea was set on alert by the Cyprus Crisis of 1963–64. It was during this crisis-ridden period that Kudō Tetsumi (1935–1990) arrived in Paris (1962). Japan had also experienced a major crisis in 1960: the Japan-U.S. security treaty had provoked massive protests.

Kudō was already famous in Japan for his provocative performances at the Yomiuri Independent annual art exhibitions. He was greeted in Paris by sensational frenzy, but not without provoking instinctive disgust and aversion. Take the case of *Love* (1964). Kudō explains his bizarre ‘work’ as follows:

Two huge heads make a ‘love affair’ in an electric circuit. Their body is degenerated into quasi-extinction and only the head skulls have evolved. Their kissing lips are already half rotten; or rather the pair of lips no longer exists but as contact points for an electric discharge. The touching lips emit the message ‘JE VOUS AIME’ through Morse code. [...] Here we see the hideous reality of sexual intercourse: your voice, your attitude, your caresses, your smell, your sweat and moisture... all are transmitted to your body through dot-dash signals so as to create effects – just like galvanic skin response. Undoubtedly, your body at the moment is nothing but an integrated electric circuit (before the IC was invented); everything is in degeneration except for the huge head containing the brain. Why? Because the skull containing brain is the symbol of the electric circuit.⁴

This was Kudō’s response to W.A.L. Beeren, curator of the Amsterdam Municipal Art Museum. While rescuing Kudō from miserable poverty in Paris, Beeren gently protested against Kudō’s work by the need of ‘We Europeans’ to ‘retain something of human noblesse’. This was enough for Kudō to burst into a fit of rage. Or more precisely, his enemy (i.e. ‘Mr. Beeren’ in particular and ‘Europeans’ in general) had just been caught in a trap Kudō had carefully laid. Beeren wondered if *Love* represents an ‘atomic catastrophe with human bits and

4 Our retranslation from a Japanese translation of the ‘original’ English made by Nakahara Yūsuke (1968, 143). The published English version reads as follows:

Two big heads? Those two enormous head, which expose electric circuits are sitting and talking ‘love’. Their bodies are in a state of degeneration; only their heads seem to develop. They are kissing with their rooting mouths—no, their mouths are connected by electric contact parts. They say ‘JE VOUS AIME’ in Morse code. (...) when you are having sex; the voice, the caresses, the atmosphere, the smell, the heat, and the humidity... all of these convey a kind of signal to your body, a signal that achieves an effect. There’s no doubt about it: your body is a mass of circuits at that time—that is, everything degenerates at that moment, except the big head that is a symbol of the electric circuit.

This English version was originally published as Kudō Tetsumi, ‘Dear Mr. Beeren (Dear Europeans)’, and distributed in Kudō’s Exhibition catalogue held at the Galerie 20, Paris, in 1965. It was reprinted in Kudō and National Museum of Art 2013, 153.

pieces left over', and asked Kudō, 'Do you want to collect us like scalps? But why in such clinical fashion? Don't be angry, but I cannot help thinking of the Nazis who made human-skin lampshades'.

To this Kudō, with an affected sarcasm, cynically and provocatively riposted:

'Human *noblesse*?' Let me herewith diagnose your disease as a kind of nostalgia. I do not want to deny your Christian tradition, your human *noblesse*, because shock treatment can sometimes have disastrous effects. But, gradually, you should try to think them as mere commodities – like stockings, ice cream, or instant coffee. They are as noble as Christian tradition and human *noblesse* – useful and convenient, too, aren't they? [...] 'Melting human beings?' Your 'human *noblesse*' is melting away and only the skin is left. But this is not 'murder' as you put it. It was not melted by chemical weapons. It is a necessary phenomenon; it begins to melt, it is molten, and it is reborn as a new transparent body (organism)'. (Kudō and National Museum of Art 2013)

In the subtitle of the text we read 'Dear Europeans'. Obviously this text was addressed to all Europeans. What was, then, Kudō's message to 'Europeans'? Kudō strongly felt that he had been deceived. He had naively believed while in Japan that the idea of liberty and freedom in expression was unconditionally respected in Europe. In reality, however, he found Europe bound to the idea of 'human noblesse', which he found hypocritical. In reality, human dignity had been threatened (during WWII and the following Cold War crises). And yet, by crudely revealing this plain fact of decaying humanity by way of artistic expression, Kudō had to face harsh criticism and instinctive repugnance from European intellectuals.

If so, intentionally provoking repugnance by way of artistic expression then became a convenient and useful weapon for Kudō: by transgressing the implicit moral code of 'human noblesse', Kudō successfully dis-covered, laid bare, the trauma in the depth of the European psyche. The idea of *liberté* was in fact *l'autre face* (the other hidden side) of a Judeo-Christian God. *Liberté* is guaranteed only at the cost of total surrender to God. Kudō continues:

I can understand you Europeans creating God in your own image. But I think it's high time God was sold in the automats, neatly wrapped in small plastic bags. Anyway, your opinion is to me nothing more than a guinea-pig reaction. Please don't misunderstand me. I don't think of you alone as guinea-pigs [for scientific experiments] – all people to me are guinea-pigs to a doctor. (Kudō and National Museum of Art 2013).

3 Humanism in Question

3.1 *Decomposed Humanism*

Kudō did not come to Europe to learn the idea and ideals of humanism in Art. On the contrary, he claimed himself to be an outrageous and childish suicide-attack commander. To throw the Fine Arts as an institution into commotion and disturbance, or even into a delusion, was his only objective. Yet destruction was not the aim; rather, his *raison d'être* in Europe was not to 'provoke' but to provide a cure, a remedy to the disease of 'human dignity and noblesse' by which Europe was completely 'contaminated' in Kudō's eyes and perception. Of course this was by definition 'outrageous', i.e. excessive and beyond his position or status, and Kudō himself was well aware of his 'measureless' ambition (*ambition démesurée*). His dream was to be integrated into Europe as a kind of retro-virus, so as to dismantle and regenerate the Idea of Europe from within.

At a public lecture in Japan, Kudō gave the following explanation of his *Human Dwarf Tree Ningen Bonsai*:

To explain it to the Japanese, one should say; to make a good career you should be moulded into a good form under the constraint of the wire rope like this 'bonsai'; this is the only way to compete with foreigners [i.e. Europeans]. To explain the same human dwarf tree to Europeans, one should modify the logic and say: despite the constraint of the chains and wire rope, life searches for its emancipation. We can understand in this way the human dignity and noblesse (Kudō 1982, 120).

This remark caused laughter among the Japanese audience.

Here is a lucid comparison of the Idea of Humanity. Sociologically speaking, while European individualism is born from the resistance to constraint, the Japanese collectivism consists of 'killing' egocentrism in the same way as 'cultivating' and 'taking care' of the dwarf tree. Both have their merits and demerits: on the one hand Europe is affected by the disease of deformity (the idea of liberty and freedom creates a hideous freak), whereas on the other hand, Japanese society hampers the freedom of/to deformity. Kudō, as an alienated exile and absolute outsider, does not belong to any side. And yet his existence is only tolerated in Europe, and never 'in Japan', he adds, 'where even the freedom of provocation is not allowed'.⁵ This was why he fled Japan and stayed in Europe.

5 Kudō 1976; the original Japanese text is in Tetsumi Kudō and National Museum of Art 2013, 415.

3.2 *Toward a Philosophy of Impotence*

His confrontation with Europe as an idea led him to a kind of pessimistic defence of life through interminable germination by way of electronic, genetic and organic devices. Foreshadowing synthetic biology, which emerged only after Kudō's premature death at the age of 55 (in 1990), Kudō searched for possible ways of survival for beings that are not worth living. This severe anti-humane biology in search of an 'inhuman' sterile beauty is at the core of Kudō's so-called *philosophie de l'impotence*.⁶

According to Kudō, this 'philosophy of impotence'⁷ was born under the American 'nuclear umbrella' provided by the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which is commonly referred to by the abridged Japanese term 'Anpo'. In other words, 'impo' results from 'ampo,' if one can use a play on words. It is true that Japan enjoyed the idea of 'liberty' under the American military occupation, but the very idea of liberty was the cause of Japan's cultural impotence! Japanese culture was thus 'domesticated' or rather literally 'castrated' by the Idea of Europe.

4 In the Guise of a Conclusion

We can certainly detect here, in Kudō's extravagant endeavour and his almost insane serenity, the ultimate state of a 'clash of projections' which crisscrossed around the 'idea of Europe'. This clash occurred within the evolving 'mutual perceptions' of Europe and Japan found in the last 100 years. What began with Mori Ōgai's logical protest regarding a violation to the idea of *fraternité* (1880s) was followed by Takeyama Michio's self-conscious questioning of the idea of *égalité* (1930–40s), and *liberté* in artistic expression led Kudō Tetsumi to dismantle the idea of *humanisme* from within Europe (1960–70s).

What these three anecdotic samples suggest is this. – In a sense, Europe remains invisible so long as it is observed from within; it is rather in its interaction with its outside strangers who are crossing its contact zones or borderlines

6 My interpretation of Kudō is developed in Inaga 2017, 229–60, esp. 253, where I analyse the text quoted from Kudo 1976. Cf. also Lyotard 1988.

7 The term 'impotence' (combining French *impuissance* and *impotence*) is usually pronounced in Japanese as 'Impotenz' by using the German term, implying its strong Freudian connotation. 'Castration' on the other hand, is translated by using Chinese characters as *kyosei* 去勢 (psychoanalysis) or *danshu* 斷種 (biology). In this feeling of impotence, one may detect a typical amalgam of Buddhist 'resignation' and *Gelassenheit*, which Walter Benjamin could not attain in his self-imposed hesitation (and deliberate lack of determination) to leave Europe on time under crisis. See Vivian Liska's thoughtful chapter in the present volume.

that the intrinsic possibility of Europe as an idea reveals itself in terms of its universal crisis.

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